

**INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing and other basic needs.

Despite this commitment, millions of people in many parts of the world have little or no access to land, housing and other productive assets. More than one billion people live in inadequate housing conditions in urban areas alone. These facts are clear manifestations of the realization of economic, social and cultural rights – particularly the rights to land, housing and development – has not yet been fulfilled. Needless to say, vulnerable groups are most affected and suffer from deprivation of these rights in all societies. In this context, the conditions of indigenous peoples are particularly difficult. Indigenous peoples are rarely protected effectively under existing laws and policies. Furthermore, their specific situations, characteristics and needs are often not recognized and addressed.

Modern information and communication technologies, as well as other factors, contribute to reduce the gap between urban and rural lifestyles and aspirations. This – combined with high levels or rapid rates of urbanisation in most countries – is increasingly making indigenous issues and the needs of indigenous people important topics for human settlements planning, management and development particularly in relation to addressing the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

Many problems and issues relating to indigenous peoples’ rights to land are directly reflected in their living and housing conditions. The relationship with the land and environment – including housing – is the core obstacle that confronts indigenous societies everywhere.

In this relation – and as the Special Rapporteur on “Indigenous peoples and their relationships to land” has elaborated – there are unique elements to the conditions of indigenous peoples. These include, but are not limited to:

- a profound relationship exists between indigenous peoples and their lands, territories and resources;
- this relationship has various social, cultural, spiritual, economic and political dimensions and responsibilities;
- the collective dimension of this relationship is significant; and
- the intergenerational aspect of such a relationship is crucial to indigenous peoples’ identity, survival and cultural viability.

The current difficulties confronting indigenous people with regard to their rights to land and to an adequate standard of living, including housing, are due mainly to the failure of States to acknowledge indigenous peoples’ rights to land, territories and resources and due to existing discriminatory laws and policies which are affecting indigenous peoples in relation to their lands. Both of these main causes are very complex and have many dimensions.

**OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the panel discussion are to sustain and enhance the dialogue between stakeholders – particularly the organizations of indigenous peoples and relevant United Nations Agencies/Programmes – on the vitally important issue of improving living conditions of indigenous peoples, through –

- exchange of information and experience on the rights of indigenous peoples to land and housing; and
- organization and promotion of networking between relevant stakeholders.

**ORGANIZATION**

The panel discussion is organized jointly by UN-HABITAT and the International Indian Treaty Council.

After an introductory statement by the Chairperson, elaborating on the objectives and context of the panel discussion, the panellists will reflect on the focus, views and activities of their respective organizations. Followed by questions and answers from the floor and an open discussion, the Chairperson will conclude the event with suggestions on how to best sustain this dialogue.

The Chairperson and panellists include the following:

- Erica-Irene A. Daes, United Nations Special Rapporteur on “Indigenous peoples and their relationship to land” (Chairperson) (to be confirmed);
- Julian Burger, Secretary of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; and Co-ordinator, Team on Indigenous Issues, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR);
- Antonio Gonzales, United Nations Liaison, International Indian Treaty Council;
- Selman Ergüden, Acting Chief, Housing Policy Section, UN-HABITAT; and Co-ordinator, United Nations Housing Rights Programme;
- Lilikala Kameʻeleihiwa, Director, Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies;
- Paul Munro-Faure, Chief, Land and Tenure Service, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The panel discussion will be held in English.
VENUE AND DATE
The Panel discussion will be held on 17 May 2002 in Conference Room 2 in the United Nations Headquarters, New York, between 13.15 and 14.45.

REFERENCE MATERIAL
Chairpersons, panellists and participants are encouraged to bring and disseminate information material related to their focus, experiences and activities.
A pamphlet on the United Nations Housing Rights Programme will be made available to participants.
The UN-HABITAT report titled “Position Paper on Housing Rights” and the project document for the first phase of the United Nations Housing Rights Programme are available from the following URL: <http://www.unhabitat.org/unhrp>.

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“In order to promote the continuing progress of indigenous people and to ensure their full participation in the development of the rural and urban areas in which they live, with full respect for their cultures, languages, traditions, education, social organizations and settlement patterns, Governments and leaders of indigenous communities, within the national context, should:
(a) Take particular actions to enhance their productive capacities, ensuring their full and equal access to social and economic services and their participation in the elaboration and implementation of policies that affect their development;
(b) Support the economic activities of indigenous people in order to improve their conditions and development and to secure their safe interaction with larger economies;
(c) Integrate indigenous women, their perspectives and knowledge, on an equal basis with men, in decision-making regarding human settlements, including sustainable resource management and the development of policies and programmes for sustainable development, including, in particular, those designed to address and prevent environmental degradation of land;
(d) Address the particular needs of indigenous children and their families, especially those living in poverty, thereby enabling them to benefit fully from economic and social development programmes.”

Habitat Agenda, paragraph 122.